



Florida Democratic Party & Blue Rose Research

Party Branding Message Testing Memorandum

The Democratic Party faces a branding crisis - and has been facing this crisis for decades. This situation has both been exacerbated and also generated renewed attention since the 2016 election, but it is not a new phenomenon. In 1989, Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William Galston wrote a paper for the Progressive Policy Institute, *The Politics of Evasion: Democrats and the Presidency*, that could be quoted verbatim today; it spelled out the issue of working class voters fleeing the Democratic Party, and the Party apparatus increasingly being influenced and operated by high earning liberals who are culturally distinct from the average American voter.

As of 2022, there exists a plethora of literature, commentary, and research on what Democrats shouldn't do and what Democrats shouldn't say - no shortage of diagnosis yet a striking absence of remedy. **This memorandum is intended to provide guidance on what Democrats should say.** The core audience this memo is intended for are Florida Democratic Party operatives, activists, and staffers who want to win - and win without abandoning our core values of decency, respect, individual freedom, and equality.

Background

In a state that passed a minimum wage increase with 61% of the vote on the 2020 general election ballot, Democratic operatives overlook Florida voters at the party's expense, not simply for electoral victories, but also as a bellwether for ongoing cultural re-alignments that have major political ramifications nationally. Florida voters represent the shift in the American electorate, in which the Democratic Party has been bleeding voters - across races and ethnicities - who are economically open-minded to progressive stances, yet culturally more aligned with conservatives.

The Florida Democratic Party members who are embedded in their communities and listening to voters every day have been emphasizing the inroads we could be making with these communities, and highlighting how the right approach in Florida reflects the best approach the Party can take nationally.

To back our communications approach with data, and quantify our assumptions, the Florida Democratic Party collaborated with Blue Rose Research to examine the attitudes among voters in Florida on a variety of subjects, core political stances, and current political events. This research shows that **the Democratic Party has an effective message in Florida regarding our core economic and health care positions, and our vision of what the Democratic Party stands for.**

Methodology

Blue Rose Research collected over 10,000 survey responses across Florida from November 2021 through January 2022 via online web panels. The surveys over-sampled Hispanic voters and those residing in Miami-Dade County, and also was provided in Spanish.



Sixty-three messages were tested in a randomized controlled trial environment in-survey as a separate treatment, and evaluated on Democratic vote choice - 48 were pro-Democratic messages, and 17 were Republican attack messages. The results are modeled to reflect change in two-way Democratic Congressional vote choice.

Persuasive Messaging

DO emphasize concrete issues that are salient in the lives of a broad base of voters. The top messages also corresponded to top issues in our national tracking: the cost of living and the economy more generally.

Of the 48 pro Democratic Party messages tested, the top testing message overall and among Trump voters in Florida is:

...[Democrats] want to make prescription drugs and health care more affordable. They plan to expand access to healthcare through Medicaid, and to empower Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices with drug companies. [Democrats] say that we need to lower the cost of living for Americans and stop protecting drug company profits.

Other kitchen-sink style messages that were persuasive across voters, and amongst Trump voters specifically:

...[Democrats] are working to make home ownership affordable again. They know that home prices, utilities and insurance costs are pricing Floridians out of owning a home and achieving the American dream in Florida. They say it is time for the government to support more affordable housing.

...[Democrats] are cutting taxes for working families, and fighting to reduce the cost of living for all Americans, from health care, to elder care, to child care. Democrats say their plans will be paid for by making sure big corporations start paying their fair share in taxes, and no one making less than \$400k will see their taxes go up.

DO draw on aspirational and conciliatory language, to give voters optimism about the future.

It's OK to address historical or current challenges our country and society faces, but it's essential to do so in a way that avoids criticism/shame, and orients around a better future together.

... [Democrats] believe in the founding values of our country - that everyone in this country is created equal and is deserving of a life of dignity and respect. They say that in today's political battles, we often forget that most people in this country are just trying to work hard and provide for their families - regardless of their race, gender, or any other differences between us.



...[Democrats] believe that everyone can make it in America. They say that they are working to ensure that everyone - regardless of race, religion or where they were born - has a fair chance at success, can support themselves and their family with hard work, and can pursue the American dream.

...[Democrats] believe that every American should do their fair share and work hard, and also that everyone deserves a fair shake. They say that we can't ensure that everyone will be successful, but we can give every child the education they need to work hard and try to make a decent living for themselves, no matter their background

...[Democrats] believe in the value of hard work and that responsibility should be rewarded. They say that if you work hard in this country you should be able to make a living and take care of your family. They want to make sure that hard work pays off.

DO speak to our values when wading into controversial topics - just make sure that they're communicated in ways that people outside of liberal circles will understand. We have effective messaging in policing and education - two areas where the GOP has continually tried to make Democrats look radical. It's important to speak to our values while remaining relatable to voters.

...[Democrats] believe the most fundamental responsibility of government is to provide for the safety and security of its people. Successful policing involves earning the trust of all residents through professionally trained police officers governed by a clear set of rules, including the use of force that respects the dignity and rights of your residents.

...[Democrats] believe that all American children should receive a fact-based education that doesn't change depending on their zip code. They say that without negatively attributing the mistakes of our past to any one group, teaching our history allows us to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future. We should teach all aspects of American history in our schools - the good and the bad.

Ineffective Messaging

The standard Republican attacks - socialism, defund the police, critical race theory - are effective at moving vote choice away from Democrats to varying degrees. But the way we respond to these attacks is critical.

Our research shows that we cannot simply differentiate local Democrats from the national brand by going negative on factions of our party or our opponents. Our attempts to directly differentiate ourselves from the left flank of the Democratic Party brand largely fell flat. Two attempts explicitly calling out communism, socialism, and defund the police actually caused respondents to support Republicans at higher rates ("backlash").

We can selectively counter-position against the GOP on their "traditional" issues like crime and policing, but these approaches are higher-variance, and aren't stand-out performers - and there is a risk when we rhetorically raise the salience of issues Democrats are viewed as weak on.



However, one message that attempted to differentiate local Democrats from the national brand was effective - it differentiated Florida Democrats from Democrats (and Republicans) in DC not on ideological lines, but on being solutions oriented:

...[Florida Democrats] want to bring people together to build a better future. While Republicans and some Democrats in Washington like to spend all their time arguing, Florida Democrats are creating real solutions to lower the cost of living, pushing for policing that is fair for everyone but also keeps our communities safe, and making sure every American has an opportunity to build a better life.

This doesn't mean liberal virtue signaling is the right approach. Among messages that had zero or negative effects, half used language common in elite Democratic circles today.

The best approach is to focus on the core themes laid out in the previous section, avoid attacking those directly affiliated with the Democratic Party in the public mind, and when necessary, differentiate local candidates from those in Washington who spend their time arguing rather than focusing on reaching solutions.

Avoid over-the-top language about our opponents. We care deeply about politics, and this is one of the ways that we're different from the voters we most need to persuade. Our audience doesn't view Republican politicians the exact same way we do, and cannot spend their day following along with what Republican politicians are up to as closely as we do. An example of this type of over-the-top language is painting them as evil or discriminatory towards their constituents:

...[Democrats] believe that every citizen is equal, and deserves dignity and respect from their elected leaders. They say that Ron DeSantis doesn't believe that Americans from other countries are real Americans, and that's why he pushes policies that discriminate against them and their children. Florida Democrats stand up for all Americans, always.

Conclusion

The research in this memo evaluated 63 messages out of an infinite combination of words - the testing is not done, nor should it ever be. Public opinion is constantly shifting, new issues emerge into the spotlight, and Democratic Party operatives must always be prepared to test more, adapt, and re-test.

Our consistently best approach is to talk about concrete, salient issues in the lives of voters, using optimistic and unifying language. We will continue to iterate on this testing, and encourage readers to not only consider our findings, but to also test your own assumptions.



Utilizing the findings

The top performing messages can be leveraged in speeches, background for journalists, interviews, paid media, and social media.

The general framing of these messages is the far more important takeaway than the individual words utilized. They do not have to be quoted verbatim if the core theme of the message is utilized: The Democratic Party believes that hard work should be rewarded. The Democratic Party is fighting for a better health care system that works for everyone. The Democratic Party believes in an economy that works for the people, and not the wealthy special interests who rig the rules in their favor.

Excerpt from remarks by Florida Democratic Party Chair, Manny Diaz, during the 2021 Leadership Blue Gala:

Florida Democrats believe in the founding values of our country – that everyone is created equal and deserves a life of dignity and respect.

Most Floridians are just trying to work hard and provide for their families – regardless of their race, gender, or any other differences.

Florida Democrats must work to ensure that everyone – has a fair chance at success... can support themselves and their family with hard work... and can pursue the American dream.

We believe that hard work and responsibility should be rewarded.

If you work hard, you should be able to make a decent living and take care of your family.

Florida Democrats do not malign the American Dream... we celebrate it.

About Blue Rose Research

Blue Rose Research is a project of OpenLabs to help campaigns make higher quality strategic decisions with accurate measurements. Our team of 20+ passionate and progressive software engineers, machine learning engineers, and social scientists specialize in

- **Polling:** Solving fundamental problems plaguing the polling industry today by applying state of the art tools from machine learning and Bayesian statistics.
- **Message and creative testing:** Providing rapid turnaround testing guidance for communications professionals on what messaging works and what doesn't on the key issues of the day.



Appendix

Below are topline results for change in House vote choice from 48 Democratic messages overall and by 2020 vote choice. Message text can be made available upon request.

Message	Overall	Biden	Trump
Health Care Reform	1.0%	1.3%	0.7%
Founding Values	0.8%	1.1%	0.6%
Minimum Wage Principle	0.7%	1.0%	0.4%
Cost Of Living Pay Fors	0.7%	1.1%	0.3%
American Dream	0.7%	1.0%	0.4%
Voting Fairness	0.6%	1.0%	0.2%
Education Funding	0.6%	0.8%	0.4%
Home Prices	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%
Obama 2012 Hard Work	0.6%	0.8%	0.4%
Big Pharma	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%
Divide Us	0.5%	0.9%	0.3%
Recovery	0.5%	1.0%	0.2%
Small Business	0.5%	0.8%	0.3%
FI Dem Gop Contrast	0.5%	0.8%	0.3%
Obama 2012 Fair Shake	0.5%	0.7%	0.3%
Education History	0.5%	0.7%	0.3%
Moving Into Future	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%
Middle Class	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%
Hispanic Themes Small Business	0.5%	0.6%	0.3%
Education Curriculum	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
Law And Order General	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%
Abortion Freedom	0.4%	0.7%	0.2%
Education Teachers	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%
Unaccompanied Minors	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%
Democracy	0.4%	0.8%	0.0%
Tax Suspensions	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%
Freedom Party	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%
Law And Order 3 Principles	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%
Covid Contrast	0.3%	0.5%	0.1%
Race In Schools	0.3%	0.5%	0.1%
Desantis Puppet	0.3%	0.6%	-0.1%
Real Americans	0.3%	0.6%	-0.1%
Neighborhood Security	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%



Curb Crime	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%
Paycheck Security	0.2%	0.5%	-0.1%
Education Parent's Rights	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%
Civility	0.2%	0.4%	-0.1%
Fl Dem Contrast	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%
Anti Racism	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Obama 2012 Out Built	0.0%	0.1%	-0.1%
Dark Money	0.0%	0.1%	-0.2%
Families Together	0.0%	0.0%	-0.1%
Farc Good Judgment	-0.2%	-0.3%	-0.1%
Crt Econ Pivot	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%
Farc Explanation	-0.4%	-0.5%	-0.3%
Anti Communism	-0.5%	-0.7%	-0.4%